

CHAPTER 4—DESIGN OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS ASSESSMENT READING

BLUEPRINT

As indicated earlier, the English language arts framework for reading is based on Maine's *Learning Results*, which identifies five **content standards** that apply specifically to reading and reading comprehension. Those content standards are:

- **Process of reading:** Students use the skills and strategies of the reading process to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate what they have read.
- **Literature and culture:** Students use reading, listening, and viewing strategies to experience, understand, and appreciate literature and culture.
- **Language and images:** Students demonstrate an understanding of how words and images communicate.
- **Informational texts:** Students apply reading, listening, and viewing strategies to informational texts across all areas of curriculum.
- **Research-related writing and speaking:** Students work, write, and speak effectively in connection with research in all content areas.

The content standards have been adapted to create a reporting category framework for reading, as shown below.

Passage Type	Comprehension of Literary and Informational Texts			Total
	Reading Comprehension and Literary Analysis	A. Process of Reading	C. Language and Images	
B. Literature and Culture: Literary Passages				50%
D. Informational Texts: Content Passages Practical Passages				50% (30%) (20%)
Total	80%	20%		100%
H. Research-related Writing and Speaking	1 set of common questions			

CONTENT SPECS

The first major reporting category at the student, school, and district levels is “comprehension of literary and informational texts.” The data generated for this reporting category was based on questions related to three types of reading passages that reflect standards B and D of the English Language Arts (ELA) *Learning Results*. The passage types were identical to those that have been used in the MEA in past years. Fifty percent of the passages were literary works; 30% were selected from content pieces (see explanation below); and 20% were drawn from practical sources (see explanation below).

Passages included both long and short “authentic” texts—selected from reading sources that students at each grade level would be likely to encounter in their classroom and in their independent reading. None of the passages were written specifically for the assessment, but instead were collected from published works.

- **Literary passages** are represented by a variety of genres—modern narratives; diary entries; drama; poetry; biographies; essays; excerpts from novels; short stories; and traditional narratives, such as fables, myths, and folktales.

- **Content passages** are primarily informational and often deal with the areas of science and social studies. They are drawn from such sources as newspapers, magazines, and books.
- **Practical passages** are functional materials that instruct or advise the reader—for example, directions, reference tools, or manuals.

The main difference in the passages used for grades 4, 8, and 11 is their degree of difficulty. All passages were selected to be appropriate for the intended audience; however, the ideas expressed become increasingly more complex at grade levels 8 and 11.

The questions related to these passages require students to demonstrate their skills in both literal comprehension (where the answer is stated explicitly in the text) and inferential comprehension (where the answer is implied by the text and/or the text must be connected to relevant prior knowledge to determine an answer). In addition, some questions focus on the reading skills reflected in content standards A and C of the *Learning Results*. Questions of this type require students to use the skills and strategies of reading to answer questions—for example, how to identify the author’s principal purpose, such as to persuade, entertain, or inform—and to demonstrate their understanding of how words and images communicate to readers.

RESEARCH-RELATED WRITING AND SPEAKING

The research-related writing and speaking section of the MEA was introduced in 1998-1999; it yielded scores at the student, school, and district levels in the category of “research skills.” In this section, students received a written description of a hypothetical writing task and were given time to review a set of information resources about the specific writing topic. These resources included such things as articles (from encyclopedias, newspapers, and magazines); parts of books (tables of contents and glossaries); visual aids (maps, charts, graphs

and tables); and computer information (Internet resources and on-line card catalogues). The multiple-choice and short-answer questions focused on the characteristics of the information resources and appropriate and efficient ways to use the resources to gather information. This common section included eight multiple-choice, four short-answer, and one constructed-response question.

ITEM TYPES

The MEA English language arts assessment in reading included multiple-choice, short-answer, and constructed-response questions. Short-answer questions, which were new in the revised MEA, required students to write an answer consisting of several phrases or short sentences. Each type of question was worth a specific number of points in the student’s total language arts score, as shown below.

Type of Question	Possible Score Points
Multiple Choice	0–1
Short Answer	0–2
Constructed Response	0–4

TEST DESIGN

The table on the next page summarizes the numbers and types of passages and associated questions that were used in the MEA reading assessment for 1998–1999. The table shows the construction of the common, matrix-sampled, and pre-test portions of the assessment.

Session	Passage Type	MC	SA	CR	Time (minutes)
1	Lc	4	1	1	44
	Sc	3	0	1	
2	Sc and	3	1	0	40
	1 Lm or 2 Sm	6	2	1	
3	Lc and	5	1	1	52
	1 Sp or 1 Lp	3	1	1	
4 (Research)	Research Packet	8	4	1	45
Total		32	10	6	

Key

L = long passage

S = short passage

C = common

M = matrix

P = pre-test

MC = multiple-choice questions

SA = short-answer questions

CR = constructed-response questions

The charts on the following pages outline the total number of possible points—as reported—by learning results and item type.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS—READING
Number of Points Possible
Grade 4

Standard and Passage	COMMON					MATRIX					TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS
Reading Process and Language (Standards A and C)	MC	SA	CR	Points	Percent	MC	SA	CR	Points	Percent	
Acadia	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
Alcove Spring	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
Amazing Spiders	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Bacon-Tomato Sandwiches	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Be a Junk Food Detective	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Brian’s Winter	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Choosing a Companion	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Cleaning Up the Ocean	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Drinking Milk is Good for Birds	0	0	2	2	100	2	0	0	2	0	4
Fables	1	0	0	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	1
Fox Song	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
Home Grown Hydras	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
How Turtle Got His Long Neck	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
I’m Going to be Famous	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Let’s Write a True Life Story	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Little Green Riding Hood	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Lupine Lady	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Marsha	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
On My Own with Alex	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	0	5	100	5
Rats Don’t	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3	100	3
Ruby	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
Sarah, Plain and Tall	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Save the Coral	2	2	0	4	100	0	0	0	0	0	4
Secret Place	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
Sliding	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	4	100	4
Smithsonian	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Spring Poems	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	4	100	4
The Beginning	1	0	0	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	4

The Fastest Kid in the Fifth Grade	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	3	100	3
Think of It	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
Trumpet Club Books	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Welcome to the Inventors Club	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	0	5	100	5
What Do You Think-Sports Poll	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	4	100	4
Literature and Culture (Standard B)	MC	SA	CR	Points	Percent	MC	SA	CR	Points	Percent	
Alcove Spring	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	4	12	100	12
Brian's Winter	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
Fables	2	0	4	6	100	0	0	0	0	0	6
Fox Song	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	4	100	4
How Turtle Got His Long Neck	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	5	100	5
I'm Going to be Famous	0	0	0	0	0	5	4	4	13	100	13
Little Green Riding Hood	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	4	100	4
Lupine Lady	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	4	8	100	8
Marsha	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
One Brave Summer	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	4	9	100	9
Rats Don't	0	0	0	0	0	3	4	4	11	100	11
Ruby	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	3	100	3
Sarah, Plain and Tall	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	5	100	5
Secret Place	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	3	100	3
Sheila's Swimming Lesson	0	0	0	0	0	6	4	4	14	100	14
Sliding	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Spring Poem	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	5	100	5
The Beginning	4	2	4	10	100	0	0	0	0	0	10
The Fastest Kid in the Fifth Grade	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	4	6	100	6
Think of It	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Informational Texts (Standard D)	MC	SA	CR	Points	Percent	MC	SA	CR	Points	Percent	
Acadia	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	4	100	4
Activity: Sprouting Sprouts	3	2	0	5	100	0	0	0	0	0	5
Amazing Spiders	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	4	8	100	8
Bacon-Tomato Sandwiches	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
Be a Junk Food Detective	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	4	100	4
Choosing a Companion	0	0	0	0	0	5	4	4	13	100	13
Cleaning Up the Ocean	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	4	100	4
Drinking Milk is Good for Birds	0	0	0	0	0	4	2	0	6	100	6
Home Grown Hydras	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	4	8	100	8
Let's Write a True Life Story	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2

Meet a Garbologist at Work	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	6	100	6
On My Own with Alex	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	4	9	100	9
Save the Coral	2	0	4	6	100	0	0	0	0	0	6
Shivers and Goosebumps	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	4	9	100	9
Smithsonian	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
Three-Leaf Danger	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
Trumpet Club Books	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	4	100	4
Welcome to the Inventors Club	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	4	9	100	9
What Do You Think- Sports Poll	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Research Skills (Standard H)	MC	SA	CR	Points	Percent	MC	SA	CR	Points	Percent	
Research Packet	8	8	4	20	100	0	0	0	0	0	20

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS—READING
Number of Points Possible
Grade 8

Standard and Passage	COMMON					MATRIX					TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS
Reading Process and Language (Standards A and C)	MC	SA	CR	Point s	Percent	MC	SA	CR	Point s	Percent	
A Create-Your-Own Yogurt Project	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
An American Childhood	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
At the Movies	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
COOL SCIENCE- A Lesson Runs Through It	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
D-Day	1	0	4	5	100	0	0	0	0	0	5
Diary of Anne Frank/Zlata's Diary	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Foreward/Oranges	1	0	0	1	100	0	0	0	0	0	1
Go Fly a Kite	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
I Remember	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
It All Began with a Picture	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
Leave Well Enough Alone	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Making Things Work	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3	100	3
On Being a Granddaughter	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	4	100	4
Pretty Boy Floyd	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Principles of Art	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Right Smart O' Wind	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	6	100	6
Road Runner	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
Scarecrow or Bogle: Varieties of Language	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
Snow	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
St. Elmo's Fire	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
The Ant Parade	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	4	6	100	6
The Base Stealer	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
The Boy With the Billion-Dollar Secret	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
The Debate Over Closing the Door to America	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
The Life of the Ladybird Beetle	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	5	100	5

The Mouse at the Seashore	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
The Snow in Chelm	0	0	0	0	0	4	2	0	6	100	6
To Build a Dam	3	0	0	3	100	0	0	0	0	0	3
Uncle Joe	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	4	100	4
Why I Never Shoot Bears	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Wreck of the Monkey Cage	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
You Can be an Inventor	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3	100	3
Literature and Culture (Standard B)	MC	SA	CR	Point s	Percent	MC	SA	CR	Point s	Percent	
An American Childhood	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	4	12	100	12
At the Movies	3	0	0	3	100	0	0	0	0	0	3
Children of the River	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	2	5	100	5
D-Day	2	0	0	2	100	0	0	0	0	0	2
Diary of Anne Frank/Zlata's Diary	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	4	100	4
Forward/Oranges	4	2	4	10	100	0	0	0	0	0	10
Graduation Morning	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	2	5	100	5
He'll Never Come to Much	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3	100	3
I Remember	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
It All Began with a Picture	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Leave Well Enough Alone	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
Making Things Work	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3	100	3
On Being a Granddaughter	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	2	10	100	10
Pretty Boy Floyd	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
Snow	0	0	0	0	0	2	4	2	8	100	8
The Base Stealer	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	2	7	100	7
The Mouse at the Seashore	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	4	100	4
The Snow in Chelm	0	0	0	0	0	2	4	2	8	100	8
Uncle Joe	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	2	10	100	10
Why I Never Shoot Bears	0	0	0	0	0	2	4	2	8	100	8
Wreck of the Monkey Cage	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	2	7	100	7
Informational Texts (Standard D)	MC	SA	CR	Point s	Percent	MC	SA	CR	Point s	Percent	
A Bad Experience With A Coach	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3	100	3
A Create-Your-Own Yogurt Project	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
At the Movies	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Becoming More Assertive	3	2	0	5	100	0	0	0	0	0	5
COOL SCIENCE- A Lesson Runs Through It	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	4	100	4

Gentle Friends, Essential Allies...	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	0	5	100	5
Go Fly A Kite	0	0	0	0	0	5	4	4	13	100	13
Niagra Falls	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	4	9	100	9
Principles of Art	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	4	8	100	8
Road Runner	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	4	7	100	7
Scarecrow or Bogle: Varieties of Language	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	4	100	4
St. Elmo's Fire	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
The Ant Parade	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	3	100	3
The Boy with the Billion-Dollar Secret	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	4	100	4
The Debate Over Closing the Door to America	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	4	12	100	12
The Life of the Ladybird Beetle	0	0	0	0	0	5	4	0	9	100	9
To Build A Dam	1	2	4	7	100	0	0	0	0	0	7
Turf Tickers	0	0	0	0	0	6	4	4	14	100	14
You Can be an Inventor	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	100	2
Research Skills (Standard H)	MC	SA	CR	Point s	Percent	MC	SA	CR	Point s	Percent	
Research Packet	7	8	4	19	100	0	0	0	0	0	19

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS—READING
Number of Points Possible
Grade 11

Standard and Passage	COMMON					MATRIX					TOTAL POSSIBLE POINTS
Reading Process and Language (Standards A and C)	MC	SA	CR	Point s	Percent	MC	SA	CR	Point s	Percent	
AAA Southeastern Maine Car Trip	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
A Day at the Theater	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
A Father Sees a Son	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	100	4
A Presidential Candidate	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	4	8	100	8
At Harvest Time	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	5	100	5
Bored	2	0	0	2	100	0	0	0	0	0	2
Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce Speaks	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Children of the Sun	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Close Call at the Ball Park	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3	100	3
Consumer Caution	1	0	0	1	100	0	0	0	1	0	1
Create Your Own Photomontage	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
Dead Snails Leave No Trails	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3	100	3
Deer Among Cattle	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
Discover White Water	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Franklin D. Roosevelt's War Message Against Japan	0	0	0	0	0	2	4	0	6	100	6
Garden Wisdom	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3	100	3
Growing Up	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3	100	3
I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Life in the Thirteen Colonies	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Life There On French Island, It Was Out of This World	0	0	2	2	100	0	0	0	0	0	2
Lucinda Matlock	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	100	2
Mt. Katahdin Via the Knife Edge	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
Nearer	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
New Directions	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
Piltdown Man	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Prevent Repetitive Strain at the Keyboard	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Rosa Parks Describes Her Arrest	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	3	100	3

Splash Course	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
Spring Song	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
Sweet Season	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	0	5	100	5
The Angry Winter	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
The Dream	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
The House on Mango Street	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
The Power of Dance	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
The Return	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	100	2
University of Maine	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
William	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
Winterizing Lawn Mower	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	5	100	5
Reading Comprehesion (Standards B and D)	MC	SA	CR	Point s	Percent	MC	SA	CR	Point s	Percent	
A Father Sees a Son	0	0	0	0	0	6	4	0	10	100	10
A Presidential Candidate	0	0	0	0	0	4	2	0	6	100	6
At Harvest Time	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	4	100	4
Bored	1	4	0	5	100	0	0	0	0	0	5
Café	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	0	5	100	5
Childeren of the Sun	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	4	100	4
Close Call at the Ball Park	0	0	0	0	0	3	4	4	11	100	11
Deer Among Cattle	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	4	7	100	7
Garden Wisdom	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	100	2
Growing Up	4	0	2	6	100	0	0	0	0	0	6
I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	4	100	4
Lucinda Matlock	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	4	7	100	7
Nearer	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
New Directions	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	4	100	4
Spring Song	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
The Angry Winter	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	4	12	100	12
The House on Mango Street	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	4	7	100	7
The Return	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3	100	3
William	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	4	100	4
Informational Texts (Standard D)	MC	SA	CR	Point s	Percent	MC	SA	CR	Point s	Percent	
AAA Southeastern Maine Car Trip	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	3	100	3
A Day at the Theater	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	4	100	4
Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce Speaks	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2

Consumer Caution	2	0	2	4	100	0	0	0	0	0	4
Create Your Own Photomontage	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	4	100	4
Dead Snails Leave No Trails	0	0	0	0	0	3	4	4	11	100	11
Discover White Water	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	4	100	4
Franklin D. Roosevelt's War Message Against Japan	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	4	8	100	8
Garden Wisdom	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	100	4
Life in the Thirteen Colonies	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	4	100	4
Life There On French Island, It Was Out Of This World	4	4	0	8	100	0	0	0	0	0	8
Mt. Katahdin Via the Knife Edge	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	4	7	100	7
Piltdown Man	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	4	100	4
Prevent Repetitive Strain at the Keyboard	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
Rosa Parks Describes Her Arrest	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	4	6	100	6
Splash Course	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	4	100	4
Sweet Season	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	4	9	100	9
The Dream	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	100	1
The Power of Dance	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	4	7	100	7
University of Maine	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	100	2
Winterizing the Lawn Mower	0	0	0	0	0	5	4	0	9	100	9
Research Skills (Standard H)	MC	SA	CR	Point s	Percent	MC	SA	CR	Point s	Percent	
Research Packet	8	4	8	20	100	0	0	0	0	0	20

WRITING

BLUEPRINT

The MEA assesses students' writing skills directly through the use of writing prompts, or topics, to which students respond. Maine's *Learning Results* includes two content standards that apply specifically to writing. Those content standards are:

- **Standard English conventions:** Students write and speak correctly, using conventions of standard written and spoken English.
- **Stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing and speaking:** Students use stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing and speaking to explore ideas, to present lines of thought, to represent and reflect on human experience, and to communicate feelings, knowledge, and opinions.

Note: Standard E, processes of writing and speaking, addressed students' abilities to use the skills and strategies of the writing process. This standard was assessed at the local level only.

The *Learning Results* standards were adapted to create reporting categories for writing, as shown below.

Stylistic and Rhetorical Aspects of Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Idea/topic development▪ Organization▪ Supporting detail
Standard English Conventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Grammar▪ Spelling▪ Punctuation▪ Capitalization▪ Sentence structure

CONTENT SPECS

Four broad types, or modes, of writing were used in the MEA, as listed below¹:

- **Narration:** Narrative writing answers the question, “What happened?” It tells a story through a sequence of events, so that the reader understands the action.
- **Exposition:** Expository writing informs the reader about something. Methods of exposition include comparison and contrast, illustration, classification, definition, and analysis. Methods of exposition are often combined to accomplish a specific purpose for writing.
- **Description:** Descriptive writing presents the qualities of objects, persons, conditions, and actions.
- **Persuasion/argument:** Persuasive writing uses emotional appeals to bring about a change of attitude, point of view, or feeling. Argumentative writing uses logic and reason to bring about a change of attitude, point of view, or feeling; it shows that a conclusion merits belief because of credible data, evidence, and so on.

The student’s “audience” and “purpose for writing” also influence the development, style, and tone of a written composition. These were specified as part of the prompts and varied by grade level.

Grade 4: Writing prompts required work in the narrative, expository, and descriptive modes. Formats included letters and essays. The audience for writing included one or more of the following: friends, characters from books, or the reader him or herself. The purposes for writing were mainly to inform; to describe people, places, or things; and to tell personal stories.

¹ Descriptions are adapted from *Modern Rhetoric*, by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren.

Grade 8: Writing prompts required students to write in the narrative, expository, descriptive, and persuasive modes. Formats included letters, speeches, newspaper articles, and essays. The audience for writing included one or more of the following: classmates, friends, new students, and the reader her or himself. The purposes for writing were mainly to deliver useful information and to relate personal descriptions or experiences.

Grade 11: Writing prompts were drawn from the narrative, expository, descriptive, and persuasive modes. Among the formats included were speeches, letters, newspaper articles, and essays. The audience for writing included one or more of the following: friends, classes, potential employers, a school board or other official agency, and the reader her or himself. The purposes for writing included one or more of the following: applying for a job, persuading someone to read a book, responding to a quotation, or defending an opinion.

While the MEA prompts have been categorized according to mode of writing, prompts do not always fall cleanly into a single category. Responses to a given prompt may contain elements of various modes. With this in mind, several matrix-sampled prompts used at each grade level were spread across different modes in order to achieve a desirable mix of measures for the purposes of program-level evaluation.

In addition, the prompts were developed with the following criteria as guidelines:

- the prompts must be interesting to students;
- the prompts must be accessible to all students (i.e., all students would have something to say about the topic); and
- the prompts must generate sufficient text to be effectively scored.

TEST DESIGN

Each student responded to two different writing prompts. The common prompt, administered to all students, elicited narrative writing in the 1998–99 MEA administration. The second set of prompts, matrix-sampled across the different forms of the test booklet (12 to 16 different prompts, depending on grade level), were spread across the four types of writing described previously. Each student responded to only one of the second-set prompts.

The charts on the following page outline the total number of possible points—as reported—by learning results and item type.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS—WRITING**Number of Points Possible****Grade 4**

Standard	Common Prompt	Percent	Matrix Prompt	Percent	Total Points
Standard English Conventions (Standard F)	8	66	4	34	12
Stylistic and Rhetorical Aspects of Writing (Standard G)	12	67	6	33	18

Number of Points Possible**Grade 8**

Standard	Common Prompt	Percent	Matrix Prompt	Percent	Total Points
Standard English Conventions (Standard F)	8	66	4	34	12
Stylistic and Rhetorical Aspects of Writing (Standard G)	12	67	6	33	18

Number of Points Possible**Grade 11**

Standard	Common Prompt	Percent	Matrix Prompt	Percent	Total Points
Standard English Conventions (Standard F)	8	66	4	34	12
Stylistic and Rhetorical Aspects of Writing (Standard G)	12	67	6	33	18

